January 19, 1974

Selection Committee
Patrick Wilson Scholarship in Law
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee=

Dear Sirs:

I write to urge the awarding of your scholarship to Howard Roffman, believing that he, more than anyone else I have ever met, is the kind of dedicated person the profession of the law needs now as never before.

In the past decade I have made many college appearances, coming to know some of these young people well. More than a thousand have written to me after reading my books. I draw upon a wide knowledge of his generation in saying that of all I have known he is preeminently the one I believe will make the kind of lawyer the nation and the profession need in this time of social and legal stress.

Unlike most candidates, he has served a unique apprenticeship. And unlike perhaps any other, one manifestation of this is a solid, shholarly book that will be published soon by a university press.

I must confess a strong bias because it is I who, beginning two and a half years ago encouraged him to become a lawyer and because, beginning when he was an exceptional high school student, a strong personal bond began to grow between us. I feel of him as a proud father does of his son.

Rather than disqualifying my recommendation, I hope you will consider that my strong personal feeling would preclude my urging upon him the career for which I did not consider him best suited.

For almost forty years I have had intimate association with lawyers, working for and with them and analyzing their professional performance. This experience I believe qualifies me to make a recommendation. It includes several Attorneys General of the United States, a number of Assistant Attorneys General at least a half dozen of whom were in charge of divisions of the Department of Justice (I worked with all of them), several district attorneys with whom I have also worked, a few judges of state and federal courts and well-known lawyers in private practice.

During the 1930s I was a Senate investigator and editor. I knew enough about evidence to prepare hearings and I went over all the work of all the staff lawyers who prepared the other hearings and the testimony adducdd, millions of words in extent. Thereafter I was an investigative reporter and Washington correspondent, In both activities I was in association with and evaluated the performance of lawyers. Currently, three cases in which I am the investigator are on their way to the Supreme Court. Two will be filed before you can receive this. Two of these cases represent serious miscarriages of justice because of the failures of the lawyers who first handled them. One is a man of national reputation.

So, more than most writers, I believe I have experience which I hope you will consider in evaluating my strong recommendation of Howard Roffman for your scholarship. As a lawyer, I believe that he will make you proud of awarding him his start.

On all your standards of evaluation I rate Mr. Roffman as high as any young man I have ever known. However, I would like to emphasize two in particular: motivation and the intangibles that are so important in determining personal character and so strongly influence all the more easily measured qualities that help make a superior human being and a superior lawyer. Here he has a tangible record that I believe reflects most if not all the qualities that can indicate what kind of lawyer he will make.

The title of his book, "Presumed Guilty," shows a dedication to and understanding of the philosophy of the law. How many young people would not be intimidated by the subject, a critical assessment of a Presidential Commission staffed by celebrities of the law and headed by the Chief Justice of the United States? And how many would then persevere as he has, beginning in high school?

He has put into his study more time than all the Commission's counsel combined devoted to their work, an unusual diligence. He was not content with evaluating the estimated 10,000,000 words of published evidence. He first studied it and then plumbed the 300 cubic feet of unpublished evidence. And after completing his work, he voluntarily subjected it to the critical analysis of published experts. (I am not a blind partisan. I disqualified myself.) To my knowledge, he has revised his book twice, a major labor. Few indeed are the works that represent this kind of scholarship, this kind of dedicated endeavor, this kind of perseverance over so long a period of time, an almost sui generis quest for perfection.

I began writing more than 40 years ago, when I was the age at which he began this study. But I have never known or known of anyone, including myself, who had the fortitude and imagination to undertake a project of this magnitude at so tender an age.

My faith in his judgment is such that I ask him to criticize my own work. This also represents a faith he has justified in his intellectual integrity because we are competitors. He has not breached this trust. When you consider that I have been able to do what was impossible for him, conduct extensive personal investigations, and he has had unlimited access to all this work and then understand that he has successfully resisted great and normal temptation, I hope you can see in this reflection of his fine character and his exceptionally high personal standards, and how good a position I am in to measure and to recommend him.

I take this length and time for both of us and write with some passion because for so long a lifetime I have seen so much of what the best and the worst of lawyers have done and what this can mean for society. Our dedicated lawyers are the bastion of our freedom and the guarantors of a decent society.

I tell you with all the sincerity I can summon that I believe Howard Roffman will make a truly superior lawyer. And I hope you will help

make this possible by awarding him a scholarship. This courageous young man who has the native ability to do what I have described while maintaining an unusually high record of academic achievement has, I believe, both earned and amply justified help. He holds every promise of being a credit to those who help him and to the profession.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg